2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

622 who are sexually inactive from contracting *ndaka*.[1] At the same
621 time the headman gives each household a piece of the fire which
751 has been newly kindled in the traditional way by rubbing two sticks together.

834 The mystical danger inherent in the act of setting up a new
372 village is well brought out in the propitiatory prayer and the abstinence from sexual intercourse. Once again it is the village headman who must make the offering to his ancestors; and it is
● [833] the village headman who has intercourse with his wife so that the effluvium from his sexual activity may permeate the medicine in the hut and so protect the villagers from *ndaka*. Lastly, it is very important that the whole village cooks and is warmed by one fire. 'We are of one fire' expresses the common origin of two villages; though in fact every time a new village is founded a new fire should be kindled. To bring fire from the village of origin is to bring sorcery, since the Yao believe that sorcery can operate between persons closely linked by kinship only. To have one's own fire is to be autonomous from other groups.

The Burdens and Rewards of Headmanship

622 MacDonald had the perspicuity to see not only that the village
554 headman was the representative of a corporate group and that he represented this group to outsiders, but also that he represented external authority to his villagers. The village
[769] headman who in his person stood for the unity of the group, performed certain ritual acts which emphasized this, such as praying to the village ancestors. In spite of the decline of the ritual his position is still regarded as exceptional. Much, however, depends on the rank of the village headman. There may not be much difference in ritual observances and mystical dangers between a headman who has in his charge a meagre three or four huts, and a commoner. In the larger and more important

[753] [1] This is one of the most important mystical concepts of the Yao. I have described this condition and its implications more fully in *Marriage among the Machinga Yao of Southern Nyasaland* (R.-L.I. Paper), forthcoming. Briefly it is a disease characterized by œdema which affects those who are sexually inactive when they are suddenly brought into contact with a person, or an object which he has touched, after having intercourse. The people most affected are the
[833] young and the old, i.e. those who cannot have sexual intercourse. Those who are capable of intercourse are expected to have ritual intercourse with a stranger, and so fortify themselves against this dread disease.

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604 578 Mwanace. He was the junior marriage surety to the marriage and it was his duty to go to the man's marriage surety, report the matter and arrange to take some action to get the man well again. Mwanace, however, refused to take any action. Instead he tauntingly said, 'Take the matter to Ali Kasunka, it is his village.' The woman did so, and Ali Kasunka asked immediately whether she had not taken the matter to Mwanace. She replied that she had and repeated Mwanace's words. Ali Kasunka took the matter up with Mwanace who now objected to being ordered about. Ali Kasunka, however, impressed on Mwanace that the village was his (Ali Kasunka's) and the authority rested with him. He then went to the man's home to tell them of Wayison's illness. The man's representative came and he and Ali Kasunka consulted a diviner. They found that the man was ill from *ndaka*, which he had contracted in his home village. They found medicine and treated him and he recovered.

604 578 ● 833 787 684 Things came to a head in 1947. Mwanace's younger sister Nyangu II (C11) was married to a soldier who was away. One morning she came to her mother's elder sister, Mbalasyao (C1),[1] and told her that she had found semen on her pudenda and could not recall having had intercourse with anyone. Mbalasyao told Ali Kasunka about this. It was clearly a matter for divination and Ali Kasunka called Mwanace and told him that they ought to consult a diviner. But Mwanace's attitude, even in such a crisis as this, was hostile. He refused and said it was not his work to do this sort of thing. Ali Kasunka therefore went to a diviner with his sister Mbalasyao. The diviner said the semen was Mwanace's. He said that he had entered her hut magically and had sexual intercourse with her without her knowing it.[2] When Ali Kasunka got back to the village he called Mwanace and asked him what tricks he was playing in the village. Mwanace said that he had done nothing—it was not his village. Ali Kasunka then vaguely hinted at his crime. Mwanace pressed for more details and Ali Kasunka accused him outright of sleeping with his sister. He had hardly uttered the accusation before Mwanace had drawn a knife and attacked him. Mwanace was screaming something to the effect that Ali Kasunka had come to him with lies about having seen a diviner. Ali Kasunka beat off the attack and reiterated the accusation. Mwanace now turned his rage upon the woman and tried to catch her. Two of the men in the village then caught Mwanace and subdued

[1] Her mother, Amaliama, was dead.

[835] [2] This is called *cigonecesya*. It combines the use of magic with sister-incest. To the Yao mind there could be no clearer proof of sorcery. I have already mentioned the importance of sister-incest in relationship to the beliefs surrounding the sorority-group. See p. 146.

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him. The woman in the meantime had run to Chiwalo's hut half a mile away. Here she complained to the chief that Mwanace wanted to kill her. Chiwalo refused to listen to her complaint and sent for Ali Kasunka. When he had come and explained the sequence of events, he continued saying that he would like to take the case to court. Chiwalo, who was Ali Kasunka's wife's father's sister's son (hence a classificatory younger brother) and whose henchman Ali Kasunka was, refused to arbitrate in the case but referred it to Kawinga. On the day of the case the woman's husband came back from the Army. The case was tried and eventually the court assessors awarded a damages claim of £3 to be paid by Mwanace to his sister. The husband, at the same time, said that he could not remain married to her because whenever he saw her he would think that she had slept with her brother and in court he gave Ali Kasunka a marriage termination payment. The tension between Ali Kasunka and his 'sister's son' did not end there however. When they got back to the village Ali Kasunka remonstrated with Mwanace saying, 'Are you not ashamed to have married your sister?' Mwanace said that he could not stand that sort of thing and went back to live uxorilocally.

A crucial point in this case history is that the women did not like Mwanace. Almost certainly there would have been a split in the village had the women had more confidence in Mwanace. The tension between Ali Kasunka and Mwanace, although the conflict is inter-generational, started, as it consistently does, from the relationships of a man to the women of his matrilineage. Without the support of the women, younger brothers or sister's sons are impotent against the power of their senior relatives. It is only when they can induce the women to follow them and to leave their rivals that they can found a new village and thereby begin to earn prestige. Therefore, although the men are the active agents in bringing about a physical act of fission, they are in fact only making manifest a situation which is latent within the lineage.

The position of the senior male matrilineal relative is of fundamental importance in questions involving segmentation. His position is seen most clearly in the dominant matrilineage, in which the name of the village is inherited. The Yao practise 'positional succession'. A man not only succeeds to his mother's brother's name but also to the position of the mother's brother in the social structure as a whole.[1] It follows that when the

[1] See Chap. V, p. 121.

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584 betrothed. In this latter case, the child lives with one of his wives and is brought up in his house.

881 When this girl first menstruates, she tells the man's wife who in turn informs her husband. He then goes out into the bush with his axe, while the wife reports to the young girl's mother and to the man's female relatives. The girl is put to rest on a mat in the hut, the women remaining with her after shutting and fastening the door. The man, meantime, cuts a strip of bark, hammers it out into a piece of cloth, and puts the cloth, wound round and round the stem of the tree from which he has taken it, on the roof of the hut where the girl lies. The first passer-by who notices this sign, spreads the news; then all the women in the village assemble and trill with their tongues to show their joy, while the women in the house sing.

Until the girl's menstrual period is over, the old women relatives sleep each night in her hut, and instruct her in the taboos relating to menstruation. The front door is kept closed, and exit for purposes of nature is made only through the back door. When the girl is up again, the fire in the hut is extinguished, the bark-cloth which she has worn and her sleeping mat are rolled up and put away in the veranda-room, and the girl, having procured clay, replasters the floor of the entire hut. A woman then brings fresh fire from another hut.

841 At subsequent menstrual periods, there is no ceremony. The girl, as is the custom of all women at such times, must sleep on a mat apart from her husband. Sexual intercourse is strictly forbidden under penalty of dire sickness. For the same reason, no menstruating woman may put salt in the food, etc. Until the girl's first menstrual period is over, the man to whom she is betrothed stays in the hut of another wife. Later, he may cohabit with the girl.

881 If the girl has not been to her initiation ceremony, *Chiputu*,[1] on returning to her husband's hut after this ceremony, the first coitus takes place in the veranda. It must be in-
●833 complete, so that ejaculation takes place after withdrawal and the semen falls upon her cloth. This should be taken by the girl to some of the old women in the village who report on the proceedings. Should withdrawal not have taken place, the man is considered bad and the girl, unless doctored, may sicken. Later, ordinary cohabitation is allowed. This species of ceremonial coitus is called *Kusasa mauta* or in Chinyanja, *Ku-tapa mafuta*, "to roll away the oil," referring to the oil with which the girl was anointed at *Chiputu*. A girl who has no betrothed, on returning from *Chiputu* to her grandmother is given medicine similarly to prevent her sickening.

584 *Betrothal and marriage in adult life.* Apart from child betrothal, when a man seeking a wife, sees a girl he fancies, he talks the matter over with his brother, uncle, or some friend, who then goes and makes overtures to the girl's uncle or brother, her guardian or *nposue*[2] as he is called. The *nposue* corresponds very closely to our idea of a god-parent; he may be called the sponsor. The word "surety" is used by Macdonald.[3]

[1] Vide *infra*, p. 269.
[2] *Nposue* is a word adopted from the Chia, *Nkosua*.
[3] Macdonald, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 118.

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pregnant, the meeting of the sponsors will have to be postponed until after the ceremony connected with her first quickening with child, *Litiwo*.[1] This ceremony must be performed whether the girl is regularly married or not. One party cannot ask the other for permission that both ceremonies take place at the same time. The answer would be given, "You are asking me to kill two beasts with one bullet." In rare cases, the chief may sanction the marriage and *Litiwo* ceremonies taking place at about the same time, i.e. the marriage is arranged before the child is born.

Widowhood. A widow is considered unclean for a period after the death of her husband. She wears a band of palm-leaf or string around her forehead. When the period is passed and some man wishes to marry her, arrangement is made with some other man to cohabit with her for payment; she is then said to be clean and can go to her prospective husband. This ceremony is called *kutema ngonji*, "to cut the strings," or in Chinyanja, *ku-dula mlasa*, "to cut the palm"; unless it is performed, the new husband will sicken. The man introduced for the purpose is called by the Yao, *lituma*, the "hyaena," "he who comes by night."

Divorce. From time to time, married people disagree and one deserts the other. If the woman leaves the man, he has a claim against her and the man to whom she goes for all the clothes he has supplied her with during their married life. The husband usually sides with the wife's relatives and arranges that they look after the children; he does not claim them. When the husband and wife mutually wish to separate, they both meet with their sponsors and everything is duly arranged. The husband will give his wife an arrow, saying, "*Mpumbo* (the arrow)," meaning, "If I come back, may it kill me." The place of the arrow may be taken by a bullet or any other object, even a piece of grass. The man will add, "*Swaka, swaka, no likowe!* (rattling, rattling, it is a rat!)," inferring that if his wife hears something rattling in the house, it is a rat, not himself trying to come back. There is no definite payment of compensation. If the woman marries again, she presents the "arrow" to her second husband as a sign that she has been freed from her first marriage; without this token, no man would marry her.

Actual adultery was in the old days very rare owing to the strict enforcement of rules, and the case of a woman demanding divorce on account of the adultery of her husband formed a *cause célèbre*. The case heard by the chief would last for days and hundreds of people would come to listen. Neighboring Anyanja pleaders would be invited to speak and great excitement prevailed, as these latter would be accompanied by their villagers, who, to the accompaniment of continuous drumming, would sing, "*Mbawala anakadwa m'nkonde*,[2] (The bush-buck has run his head into the net)," while they ran about running their heads into their game-nets.

Other causes of separation are neglect of duty, sterility of the wife, and habitual death of the children born.

[1] Vide infra, p. 274. [2] Chin.

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or a girl who has just returned from *Chipatu* must not touch the child, as it is said, "Her body is hot and would give fever to the child." To guard against such a happening, some "clean" woman, after handing some beads to the mother, will ask to be allowed to take the infant. This indicates that should it sicken, the beads will pay the medicine-woman who comes to cure it. The mother and baby are simply washed in water and are not treated with medicine, unless meconium has been voided before the child was delivered.[1] If the infant dies before it is presented to the outside world, it is disposed of in the same way as a stillborn child, i.e. buried in the ash-heap. About the tenth day, the baby is adorned with a girdle of beads and two little pieces of stick obtained from a medicine-woman to make the infant grow fat.

The length of time during which the father and mother refrain from cohabitation after the birth of a baby varies greatly according to circumstance. Four months is probably a minimum, while two years, during which the woman suckles the child, is the common interval. After the first coitus, the man and woman wash themselves and the baby is bathed in the same water to prevent any ill coming to it.

Suckling often continues much longer than two years. If the mother dies, the child may be suckled by the grandmother, an aunt, or some other woman, but the breasts must first be treated with medicine or the child would die

A child born breech first is called *salanga*, a word which is also used to denote a variety of domestic fowl which always has the appearance of having its feathers ruffled. A child who dies before the father and mother have resumed sexual relations is buried in a grave-yard apart from that of adults. The grave, dug with sticks, not hoes, is very shallow, and when it is filled in, a heap of stones is made above it. Only women attend the burial. A deep grave would cause the mother to go on losing children at an early age. The body of such a child is called *bitusu*, "hyaena."

A woman dying undelivered is placed in the grave in the usual way and then, before filling in the earth, one of the grave-diggers descends into the pit, cuts through the enveloping shroud, and incises the abdomen. One end of a long bamboo stick or reed is inserted in the incision and the other end is brought out to the surface of the grave. If this were not done, "many would die in childbirth."

Twins are not killed by the Yao but are well treated and always cared for equally. They are given similar clothing and food.[2] There is a story that the mother of Nkwamba,

[1] *Chipatu*, *vide infra*, p. 288.

[2] C. A. Werner, 'Among the Congo Cannibals, by John H. Weeks, London, 1913, a review,' (Man, vol. 14, no. 15, 1914, p. 15).

I take this opportunity of referring to Miss Werner's review in which, speaking of twins, she says, "They are always named the Anyanja given the names *Maseli* and *Nyema*." *Maseli* in Chinyanja refers to a kind of musical instrument and the Chiyao meaning is "cocoanut palm." *Nyema* is a Chiyao word which certainly means "the back." It is sometimes used of the second born twin but does not occur in Chinyanja. I have never heard of twins either among the Wapeto or the Anyanja spoken of by these names. A mother carries the first born on the right arm and the second born on the left, but, so far as I know, she does not give a duplicate greeting nor make a habit of eating equally with both hands.

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then listens to an account of the circumstances attending the illness and death. The point at issue is whether there is any evidence pointing to death from unnatural causes which requires consulting a diviner. The chief practically always agrees with the relatives, and it is said that he will never press them to go to the *wachisango* unnecessarily. The case may end with this conference, or here may begin the long series of events described under *usuwi*.[1]

During the month subsequent to the funeral, certain taboos have to be observed. The widow may not bathe, and with the exception of the *ewilo*, all who attended must refrain from sexual intercourse. At the expiration of this period, beer is brewed in the village, and all the friends and relatives are again summoned. This beer-drinking is called "the beer of rottenness," or "the beer of resignation." In addition to the beer, food is provided, and everyone helps himself without ceremony. *Chindimba* is sung and danced and at the present day, bands of trained dancers attend, including *ching'wenyeng' wenye*.[2] A pot of beer is sunk into the ground, marking the site of the dead man's house. The night of *matapata*[3] sees husbands and wives reunited, and the widow may go through ceremonial intercourse with a man appointed for the purpose called *litunu* or *mbilo*. Sometimes the widow refuses *litunu*, and is given medicine instead to cleanse her; her body is then no longer "hot" and likely to bring disease to those about her. A widow does not marry again for two or three years. A young man who loses his wife has no longer any standing in her village after *matapata*. He is usually given a present, with the suggestion that he go elsewhere. After the death of an infant, the mother is considered unclean. She sleeps on a mat apart from her husband till after the ceremony of shaving, and then undergoes a ceremonial coitus with her husband — in which case he is called *litunu* — after which, ordinary cohabitation is resumed. If she has been a widow, or if the child was born "with disease," another man acts as *litunu*.

The morning following *matapata*, all the fires in the village are extinguished. A fresh blaze is then kindled with the fire-drill, *lumangu*, either in the chief's house or in some spot nearby, and from there, fire is carried to all the houses. The ashes of the old fires, the stones supporting the cooking pots, and the porridge sticks are taken to the cross-roads, and there destroyed. Everyone then shaves all his own hair, head, axillae, and pubis. The custom of the second shaving by the *ewilo*, described in *Africana*,[4] is, I think, an adaptation from the Anyanja. A year later, beer is again brewed, and all the relatives summoned to the village to partake of it. There is dancing, but no ceremony.

The Yao bury their dead in regular graveyards in wooded country, the thicker the forest the better, often two or three miles away from a group of villages. Different villages bury their dead in different parts of the burial ground; relatives are usually buried near one another. Graves are never revisited, and no one would enter a graveyard except at the time of a funeral, and then only after obtaining permission from the chief. Such spots are

[1] Vide infra, p. 256.
[2] Beer-drinking.
[3] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 111.
[4] Vide infra, p. 270 and Pl. I.
[5] Vide infra, p. 256.